



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

is done by the Presbyterian ministers in Derry. But let not a palpable dereliction of principle disgrace the melancholy moments of the interment of our deceased relatives and friends. If dissenting principles be good for any thing, let us be put as Dissenters even into the grave.

I am, &c.

A DISSENTER.

For the Belfast Monthly Magazine.

AN ESSAY ON THE ABSURDITY OF
DREAMS.

DREAMING is that succession of thoughts which go on in the mind while we are in a state of relaxation, and is during that time, a scene of actions in which we think we are engaged; or a knowledge and sight of things we seem to perceive. That some of the powers of our nature are dormant during sleep, and others retained, can be very satisfactorily explained. During the narrow limits of half an hour, the train of thought in our dreams is frequently so rapid, that it appears to be days, or perhaps weeks. Now this inaccuracy arises from the suspension of reason and recollection, while the conceptions of the mind are mistaken for realities; and therefore our estimates of time will be formed, not according to our experience of the rapidity of thought, but according to our experience of the time requisite for realizing what we conceive. Memory is likewise often suspended, for in the course of the same dream we confound together places and time, the most remote from each other.

The faculty of imagination appears to me to be wonderfully exerted in producing dreams; for as in our waking hours, it can transpose all the visible objects with which

we are surrounded, so in our dreams we behold great extravagance and inconsistencies; sometimes we mount the airy regions, and like the INCES-SUS DEORUM, scour over the fields and fly along the sky; and at other times we hobble along in our usual pace.

The state of health we are in has much influence on our dreams; if the brain be disordered, or the stomach affected, we find them often exceedingly wild and terrible; we sometimes imagine an enemy is pursuing us, and indignant with rage, is about to strike the fatal blow that will consign us to the dust; at other times we are centred in the middle of a battle, and, regardless of life, or the death-bringing bullets, we mow destruction around us, and cut away through surrounding dangers, and impending perils.

Our dreams are frequently suggested to us by bodily sensations; and with these, it is well known, from what we experience while awake, that particular ideas are frequently very strongly associated. I have frequently known myself to have my dreams more or less connected with subjects, and bodily pain, that immediately succeeded my sleep; and I believe every one who is in the habit of dreaming, will recollect instances, in his own case, of a similar nature.

The toper dreams of flowing bowls; the heart-wounded lover of the fair object of his passion, the soldier of ambuscades and battles; the miser who with anxious solicitude keeps a vigilant eye on his hoarded heaps, cannot but in his dreams be apprehensive of losing his all! The foul murderer who has secretly stained his hands in the blood of those, whose death will confer on him, or his associates, either preferment or pecuniary advantage, has his dreams

tainted with the fell deeds, and midnight visions haunt his wicked imagination.

Some are, even in their dreams, transported into another world, and there required for their crimes; but why need I advance a parade of arguments to support my assertion, *that whatever engages our thoughts previously to our sleep, or rivets our attention when awake, preys upon us in our dreams*

Some things respecting the phenomena of dreaming, are placed beyond the investigation of the human faculties; but several acknowledged facts, concerning the passive state of the mind, the power of association, and other useful queries, if stated, would transcend the limits and intention of this Essay; I hasten then, with all deference, to speak a few things on the absurdity of attributing dreams to any supernatural cause, as the means of predicting futurity.

The greater number of people, but chiefly the illiterate rustics, attribute to them a prophetic knowledge, and are often annoyed with conjectures of their result; but they can ground their belief upon no rational argument. May we not as well credit those feats of the imagination, those trains of thought, which go on in the mind of a waking man? In these reveries, we perform many a gallant exploit, think on pleasure, death, and all the fair variety of things. For what is dreaming, but such roving thoughts, that abuse, and sometimes delight, our curtain-d sleep?

And why need we attach a prophetic knowledge to the trains of thought in the mind, when in a relaxed state, rather than when we are awake? Can our thoughts be then more active, or our imaginations more worthy of credit? It would appear to me quite the con-

trary, for supernatural causes being removed, (as I firmly believe they are.) I would suppose the thoughts then more capable of truth and certainty, when we are in a sound state of body, and our senses active, than when we are buried in sleep, and our chief faculties wrapped in silence and repose. But some will say, have we not well grounded authority for such a belief, when we have invariably found certain dreams to be attended with particular consequences? This rarely occurs, for the same dreams are more frequently the antecedents of no effects; but the superstitious recollect, *after* a series of fortune has rolled over, that their dreams warned them, while at other times, when their fears have subsided, they find all was a *dream*, an unmeaning thought. It may be said, that God in former times intimated futurity by dreams, that Jacob and other illustrious characters of antiquity, had the divine will communicated to them in this way; but we must consider, we are not the Heaven-directed great inspired men, our primitive fathers were, nor is the divine truth or futurity revealed in such a manner in our days.

But if these arguments be not sufficiently convincing, can any person of common sense believe, that the all-wise author of nature permits man to pry into futurity, or that the fantastical whims of silly-headed old women or old men are a second sight of things? Surely no.

"Heaven from all creatures hides the book of fate!"

But if we were permitted to wander unconfined through the regions of futurity, and have the whole course of our life, our death, and other consequential circumstances, brought to light, would our minds be fraught with any knowledge use-

ful or essential to our happiness? No, in what manner events are disposed, we should not be solicitous to understand; for man would be miserable and unhappy, if he had this foreknowledge, and would pass his time in continual alarm and dread, and his mind, instead of being the seat of peace, would become an intolerable source of trouble.

How happy is the mind in which the belief of an Almighty Being dispels the phantoms of superstition, in which there dwells no fear but the fear of doing wrong! Then the mind, freed from all direful presages, will never be the victim of sorrow before its approach, nor anticipate the relish of happiness before it actually arrives.

QUINTUS QUIZ.

Doran's-Rock,
near Sainfield, Sept. 10th, 1812.

For the *Belfast Monthly Magazine*.

X. TO H.

"Non equitem dorso, non frænum depulit ore."

X PRESENTS his thanks to H. for his compliment, without feeling much affected by his censure. Literary men (and both X. and H. are certainly men of *letters*) have always been prone to praise, or to abuse one another; and in both cases, probably to serve the purposes of that little secret idol, SELF; at one time bepraising, in order to gain by the traffic of compliment; and, at another, bespattering, to bring their own merits into brighter relief, by the dark shade of obloquy cast upon others. If the spirit may be collected from the *letter*, H in his whole figure, is a capital indication that the writer, whoever he may be, has placed his foot on the *first step*

BELFAST MAG, NO. LI.

of the leaning ladder of Presbyterian promotion: the first round in the pseudo-establishment, the first flight in that back stair-case, lately constructed, which leads circuitously to the cabinet of state.

X. wishes to pay a compliment with the utmost sincerity. He thinks the letter addressed to him displays the marks of an amiable and ingenuous mind, afflicted, at times, with some conscientious writhings, and occasionally labouring, as we may suppose, under the incumbency of Royal bounty, much as a man does, after a palatable feast; under the night-mare: most willing, but most unable to shake off the onerous incubus of obligation. Or, to ascend in allusion, he appears to me, like one of these good spirits, who, in Milton's battle of the angels, has been overwhelmed under the weight of a mountain cast over him by malignant influence, and after many a dolorous groan, and a long struggling underneath, has been but lately enabled (though a spirit of purest light,) to wind out of such prison; and is now just beginning to brush up his Presbyterian plumage, rejoicing in the success of his *evasion*.

I should not indeed much wonder if this honest and honourable spirit had been himself an Abdiel, in the business of Royal Bounty, although now he stands, like the letter H, as a cross bar in the alliance of church and state, not to shake these pillars, but to sustain them. "Nor numbers nor example with him wrought to swerve from truth, or change his constant mind, *though single*;" but, at length, he too becomes entangled in the meshes of ecclesiastical authority. The "Esprit de corps" (by which I understand a *corporeal* or *corporation* spirit) takes possession of the whole man; or, what is the same thing,

H 1